International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education (IJERE)
Vol. 14, No. 4, August 2025, pp. 3295~3303
ISSN: 2252-8822, DOI: 10.11591/ijere.v14i4.27985

Using Canva and Microsoft Teams to support students' writing tasks

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Article Info

Article history:

Received Jul 4, 2024
Revised Dec 3, 2024
Accepted Mar 1, 2025

Keywords:

Canva
Informative speech essays
MS Teams
Technology
Writing task

ABSTRACT

Teachers and students face difficulties in remote learning. These difficulties can be greatly reduced by utilizing applications, such as Microsoft Teams (MS Teams) and Canva. This study investigates the effectiveness of using Canva and MS Teams as helpful resources for students assigned to write informative speech essays. Employing a sequential explanatory research design in a mixed-method approach, the study involved sixteen English majors from a private university located on Malaysia's East Coast. Students used MS Teams to complete pre-and post-tests, and afterward, interviews were held to learn more about how they felt about using Canva. The pre and post-tests showed that students improved their writing abilities when using MS Teams since they had a chance to collaborate with their peers and teachers. Qualitative findings also revealed that online learning environments promoted interaction between students and teachers and between students and their peers. The results suggest that incorporating web tools like MS Teams and Canva could enhance students' learning experience as they complete their writing projects. Overall, this study highlights the potential benefits of incorporating web technologies into the writing process and underscores the importance of seeking student feedback to improve the effectiveness of these tools.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Online education has developed into a sophisticated tool for teaching and learning throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and is still in high demand even after it has ended. The pandemic caused an unparalleled global crisis and Malaysia was not less affected. Schools, colleges, and universities had to close as a result of the abrupt outbreak, which forced a switch from traditional classroom settings to technology for learning [1]. According to a study, many platforms were used for online learning during the outbreak, including YouTube (15.6%), Google Classroom (41.3%), Google Meet or Zoom (13.8%), WhatsApp (87.2%), and other applications (12.8%) [2]. Nevertheless, remote learning has made education more accessible, breaking down geographical barriers and allowing students from diverse backgrounds to access quality education. However, the transition to online learning has not been without its challenges. One of the

most significant challenges has been the digital divide, where students from low-income families or remote areas need access to technology and internet connectivity. The lack of utilities has made it challenging for some students to engage in online learning fully. However, the haves can avail opportunities for learning since online learning enables them to use gadgets, e.g., tablets, iPads, and smartphones [3]. For the have-nots, online learning has been associated with social isolation, as students miss out on social interactions and networking opportunities in traditional classroom settings [3], [4].

Given that students were dependent on technology throughout the pandemic, it is important to pay particular attention to how they use media to enhance their learning, particularly when it comes to writing. Giving students access to more potent learning resources will require a change in strategy to overcome the obstacles. This modification guarantees that learners can acquire language proficiency and digital literacy engagingly and dynamically. Nevertheless, the difficulties associated with online learning can be greatly reduced by utilizing applications such as Microsoft Teams (MS Teams) and Canva. The former offers a platform for collaboration where teachers and students can engage in online learning, thereby mitigating feelings of loneliness [5]. Furthermore, the latter provides an intuitive interface for producing visually stimulating content, enhancing the interactivity and accessibility of the students' works [6].

A large and growing body of literature has been published on the effects of MS Teams and Canva for teaching and learning writing. A study by Ekman and Strandberg [7] found that MS Teams can be integrated into other learning management systems (LMS), such as Canva, to enhance collaboration and teamwork. The latter improved their learning by making things easier with its easy-to-use features. In addition, study by Ma *et al.* [8] used MS Teams to promote active learning while Canvas was integrated to provide students instant access to lecture links.

Previous studies also examined single usage of these tools. The students found that using MS teams is beneficial, easy, and effective at addressing the important facets of learning and information acquisition [9]. Likewise, the students claimed they enjoyed the ease and flexibility since MS Teams allowed them to interact with their teachers and peers and access course materials from any location [10]. It was found that teachers could enhance students' learning experiences by using MS Teams, a flexible platform that allows for collaboration among teacher-students and their peers [11]. A study that employed Canva to assist students in brainstorming ideas before they begin writing found that its uses enhanced engagement and performance on writing tasks [12].

Concerning the use of Canva, a study examined the perspectives of instructors and students regarding its use in English language instruction [13]. It was revealed that it fostered creativity, visual communication, and writing task engagement which enhanced the learning process for both teachers and students [13]. With its customizable capabilities and user-friendly design, the study of Utami and Djamdjuri [14] showed that Canva improved student engagement and appreciation for the writing process and encouraged active participation in completing the assigned tasks. Meanwhile, Lie *et al.* [15] revealed that its use among English language instructors and students in secondary schools during the COVID-19 epidemic helped them to navigate the challenging conditions throughout the turmoil. Therefore, what needs to be investigated in depth in order to fill the gaps in the current study can be achieved by delving deeper into the research identified earlier through a thorough review of previous research. Notably, existing studies have predominantly focused on either on MS Teams [12], [13] or Canva [16], [17]. However, the current study attempts to investigate the effects of both these online tools in a single study using MS Teams and Canva on English as a second language (ESL) learners' writing performance. Moreover, the previous studies lacked a comprehensive design to probe the issue in greater depth. For example, Wijayanti [13] studied students' perceptions of MS Teams, Adams [16] researched students' and teachers' attitudes about Canva. All these studies used quantitative designs. On the other hand, Creswell [17] used a qualitative approach to analyze students' perceptions in writing when they use Canva. The current study, however, uses both methods in collecting its data.

As far as the theory is concerned, the study uses the social constructivism theory, which holds that social interactions and teamwork actively construct knowledge. Based on this approach, learning is a collaborative process in which people solve problems, have conversations, and develop an understanding of their peers [16]. The theory of social constructivism becomes especially pertinent in the context of this investigation. This paradigm offers a theoretical explanation of how students actively contribute to the construction of writing-related tasks through collaborative activities enabled by MS Teams and Canva. According to the theory, these platforms can create a social learning atmosphere that helps students comprehend writing principles more deeply. Moreover, they can participate in insightful conversations, share opinions, and work together to improve their writing experience.

The current study uses an all-inclusive design using both quantitative and qualitative methods, i.e. a sequential explanatory design to investigate the issue. Therefore, the study aims to identify the difference between the pre-test and the post-test scores of the students in writing informative speech essay while using

MS Teams and to explore the students' perceptions of using Canva to help them prepare informative speech essays. The following research questions were formulated in this study:

i) Is there any significant difference in students' scores between the pre-test and post-test when writing informative speech essays using MS Teams?
ii) What are the students' perceptions of using Canva to help them prepare informative speech essays?

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1. Research design

This study employed a mixed method design utilizing a sequential explanatory design [17], which began with collecting quantitative data that involved an experimental study. In the second phase, qualitative data were collected in the form of interviews. In particular, MS Teams was employed as a platform to administer the pre and post-tests. Following the quantitative data analysis, the qualitative data were collected and assessed to identify students' perceptions of the use of Canva.

2.2. Participants of the study

Convenience sampling was used based on the participants' convenience and availability to expedite data collection. Sixteen students took part in the study. They were in the third semester of taking an English major at a private university on the East Coast of Malaysia when the study was conducted. It is permissible to have such a number of participants for an experimental research design since experimental techniques call for at least 15 individuals to be involved in data collection [18]. Another argument states that at least 15 people should be in the control and experimental groups for comparison [19]. The same participants were employed for the qualitative data inquiries. However, the respondents for qualitative data were counted when the students answered the open-ended items voluntarily. Only nine participants commented on their perceptions of using Canva for the assigned writing task.

2.3. Research instrument

The first research instrument is a writing task administered during pre-test and post-test sessions. The students were required to write an informative speech essay after the teacher assigned topics to them. They were given two hours to complete a narrative with the standard paragraph structures—an introduction, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion—using Canva as their writing tool. Five elements were employed to evaluate the essay, and they are i) topic selection; ii) introduction; iii) body paragraphs; iv) conclusion; and v) organization. Both the teacher and students reviewed the pre-test's writing. Nevertheless, the teacher only evaluated the post-tests since she evaluated the tests in terms of the essays' organization, content, language use, vocabulary, and grammar. Such evaluation is consistent with study by Du and List [20] stating that experts judge the writing performance on its topic, language use, vocabulary, and grammar. Another research instrument in the study is open-ended questionnaire. The teachers posted questions about the students' thoughts on using Canva for the writing task. They could make remarks and comments to complete their essays.

In terms of reliability of the pre and post writing tests, a consistent scoring rubric was applied in the two tests while for validity, we ensure that the writing tasks were aligned with the formulated objectives of the research. The instruments were also reviewed by lecturers who are experts in writing. For the validity of the open-ended questionnaire, content validity and face validity were conducted in that the former was obtained employing experts review who are the colleagues of the main author. They assessed the suitability of the items. For the latter, validity was conducted by pre-testing the instruments with a small group of students. To ensure reliability, audit trail was performed as researchers documented all the research processes to ensure transparency and consistency when interpreting the data.

2.4. Data collection procedures

Writing assignments were given to students to be completed independently outside of scheduled class time. Before the test, they were instructed to take their pre-written informative essays in Canva and upload them onto the MS Teams platform. This phase of the study aimed to encourage students to engage in a dynamic and interactive process of refining their essays using collaborative input and peer critique when they used the second platform.

The researchers followed these steps for the data collection procedures to gather the data for this study. First, students were required to complete an informative speech writing pre-test in Canva and upload it to MS Teams. The teacher and other students collaboratively assessed and revised the writing task for the first time. Then, using MS Teams again, recorded lecture notes were offered to assist them in learning how to write informative speech essays. The instructions on how to write an informative speech essay were provided in MS Teams, and they were required to listen to and study these resources. In addition, the graphical

representations of the recorded notes, such as images and mind mapping, were also used as lecture resources. They had to spend their free time reviewing the notes at their free time. After that, the teacher also instructed them to rewrite their essays for the post-writing test after one week of studying the notes. Canva was used to assist students in writing their first draft of an informative speech essay. They were free to choose any template or design available on the platform. After they prepared and submitted the first draft of the pre-test informative speech essay in MS Teams, the teacher evaluated the students' work. Specifically, their works were reviewed using the MS Teams tool, in "show conversation". The feature enabled the teacher and students to collaborate throughout the latter's learning process.

Participants had the choice to agree or disagree to fill out the open-ended questionnaire, and consent was administered via a Google Sheet. This technique guaranteed that individuals had control over their actions and that participation was voluntary. Although we have adhered to best practices for informed consent and participant autonomy, our method does not take the place of official ethical approval. Regarding participant recruitment, WhatsApp texts were sent to the first author's coworkers. Following that, these colleagues sent their students the messages along with explicit guidelines on how to take part. Before the Google Sheet was closed, participants had two weeks to finish answering the questionnaire. On a different note, it is crucial to remember that the open-ended questionnaire employed in this study was designed to collect qualitative information rather than quantifiable data in order to obtain informed consent. Traditional reliability and validity metrics, including Cronbach's alpha, are irrelevant because of its qualitative nature. Nonetheless, the previous section on research instrument has covered the validity and reliability of the data collection tools in depth.

2.5. Data analysis

After students turned in their writing, their teacher graded them and asked for feedback from their classmates. In analyzing the data of the study, a paired sample t-test was used to analyze the data and find any variations between the students' pre- and post-test informative essay scores. Such was the procedure since the researchers could see the variations and resemblances between the two phases of data collection through the data acquired throughout those two periods. In addition, the comments provided by students in MS Teams made it possible to determine their thoughts on using Canva to help them prepare the essays. Therefore, as far as data analysis of the qualitative data is concerned, the researchers employed thematic analysis as it was seen to be appropriate to draw attention to the contrasts and similarities in the data set [21], [22]. A six-staged thematic analysis was used to analyze the interviews [23] and these stages are as: i) the transcripts were read repeatedly to become familiar with the data; ii) initial codes were generated and organized; iii) connections were made among different codes to form potential themes; iv) themes were developed and reviewed; v) initial themes were refined and merged into core themes; and v) core themes were finalized.

In describing qualitative data inquiries about students' perceptions of using Canva, their comments were coded according to the arrangement of names and gender. To illustrate, student number 1, female, was coded as 'SF1' and comments from student number 16, male, were coded as 'SM16'. Their responses in the MS Team were reported in written verbatim transcription. No grammar correction was made in reporting the comments or remarks made by the participants in the open-ended items.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Students' pre and post-test scores in informative speech essays using MS Teams

The descriptive statistics show the key characteristics of the data set while the paired-sample t-test shows the difference in scores between the pre and post-tests. From the pre-test (M=15.05, SD=1.84) to the post-test [M=26.02, SD=2.78, t(15)=-16.97], there was a statistically significant rise. Tables 1 and 2 show the results of the pre and post-tests.

The findings revealed that the students performed significantly better on the post-test as compared to the pre-test. There was a significant difference ($p<0.000$) between the students' pre- and post-writing test scores and their use of MS Teams. Thus, it can be said that Canva and MS Teams have positive effects on the students' writing tasks.

The results of this study have important ramifications for the community at large as well as the field of education. These findings are in line with Rojabi [10], who found that using MS Teams created a friendly environment for students, encouraging flexibility, helping them absorb the material, and making learning English more enjoyable while interacting with their peers. Likewise, the tool encouraged consistent and meaningful participation as was found in Poston *et al.* [11] due to students being able to extend interactions between instructors and their peers.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the pre and post-tests

Groups		Mean	N	Std. deviation	Std. error mean
Pair 1	Pre-test	15.05	16	1.84	0.46
	Post-test	26.02	16	2.78	0.70

Table 2. Paired-sample of pre and post t-test essay

Comparison	Mean	Paired differences					T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error mean	95% confidence interval of the difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pre-test - post-test	-10.97	2.57	.65	-12.35	-9.59	-16.96	15	.000

Moreover, applying the theory of social constructivism, the findings suggest that students in the study built their knowledge through interactions with others and their surroundings, and therefore their learning is a social process [24]. In line with the key ideas of social constructivism, this participatory approach not only enhanced individual comprehension but also brought attention to the collective side of knowledge formation. This emphasizes the relationship between knowledge within a community learning framework and the critical role that collaborative learning has in developing meaningful writing experiences.

3.2. Students' perceptions of using Canva

Qualitative findings were employed to answer the students' perceptions of using Canva to write essays using the open-ended questionnaire. However, at the reviewing stage, themes i.e. 'Canva is helpful for students' and 'Canva is interesting' were merged into more informative and concise one. Eventually, three core themes were defined and these are i) Canva improves students' ability to find information; ii) Canva helps students to understand ideas better; and iii) attractive templates make presentations of content interesting.

3.2.1. Theme 1: Canva improves students' ability to find information

A few excerpts were extracted from the findings derived from the open-ended surveys on how Canva assisted students in finding information. A female student (SF11) believed informative content could be put on Canva as she wrote, "*Canva is suitable for the contents and very informative*." Another female student (SF4) commented that the platform displays useful information, "*there is a lot of useful information.*" Likewise, a male student (SM7), used Canva because he could get useful information. He noted, "*it is indeed full of useful information for sharing ideas.*" These excerpts strengthen the view that Canva improves students' ability to find information.

According to the results of the current study, Canva was found to enhance students' ability to access information. The students' feedback on their experience using Canva showed that they found the platform a rich source of information, albeit challenging to comprehend for some students due to technical terms. Nonetheless, they found the theme of the content to be appropriate and informative. The study also highlighted the potential of Canva to improve visual learning, as both students and teachers can adopt a design-thinking approach to problem-solving. This approach encourages creative thinking and the development of solutions to problems rather than simply identifying them. This finding confirms that Canva improves students' ability to locate relevant information associated with Wijayanti research [13]. The researchers found that the attractive images, fonts, colors, and videos in Canva enabled students to spot important information more easily. Despite its interesting features, it helped students to present information more creatively [13]. Likewise, students in Wijayanti's study [13] claimed that Canva's visually appealing photos, typefaces, colors, and videos, along with its user-friendly interface, helped them to create a favorable impression of the platform as an accessible resource for learning English. Through multimodal production, Canva that integrates listening, and reading is able to improve writing and presentation abilities while also promoting broader language development among language learners [25]. It is argued that that Canva enhances students' engagement with the target language and fosters digital literacy for the twenty-first century by enabling them to become proficient communicators through the integration of text, images, and audio [25].

3.2.2. Theme 2: Canva helps students to understand ideas better

Theme 2 describes how Canva can assist students in organizing their ideas better. This is true mainly when they use mind maps to present their ideas. As a result of using the template, they can understand the ideas that their peers presented. A student (SF5) commented that ideas used in Canva were easy to understand and read. She jotted, "*simple and cute and also so easy to understand and read*." Another female student (SF9) argued that ideas put in Canva were easily understood since its presentation was simple. She recorded, "*although the slides look simple but it is easy to understand the topic*." Her remark was similar to a

male student (SM16) as he wrote, "*the information is straight to the point and simple yet so easy to understand*." Thus, the students' perceptions verify the argument that Canva helps learners understand and organize their ideas better.

The study's findings showed that Canva improved students' understanding of essay writing compared to not using it. Furthermore, the results indicated that students believed that Canva could help them improve their writing skills. These findings aligned with Utami and Djamdjuri [14] reported that Canva could enhance students' writing abilities since the platform assisted students in comprehending the contents of their peers' writing. As a result, the activity assisted them in drafting their essays individually or collaboratively. These results also supported the idea of Wijayanti [13] in that their students found that Canva helped them write better because it made complex information easier to absorb and sharpened their attention, which helped them stay focused in the writing class. Overall, the data point to the effectiveness of web-based tools like Canva in helping students participate in virtual learning environments that could improve their writing abilities [26].

3.2.3. Theme 3: attractive templates make presentations of content interesting

Canva offers a variety of templates that students can choose from, and they only need to pick and match to make their presentation of ideas attractive. A male student (SM6) made a note describing that the variety of slides is attractive despite the arrangement of information being easy to understand. He scripted, "*the varied slides are very eye-catching and easy to understand*." For another male student (SM13), the templates on Canva provide ready-made topics, especially when using mind maps. As a result, he could insert relevant information using a mind map to brainstorm ideas for his writing. He jotted, "*the slide is cute and simple. I like the topic (suggested) by the slides*." A female student (SF10) said that the template is attractive and information using her chosen template was interesting. She wrote, "*the slide is attractive and interesting to read*." These views affirm that Canva can help teachers make the content interesting.

These results support the findings by Smaldino *et al.* [27] in that students in their study tended to be creative and innovative as they could communicate and work in their groups using Canva. Furthermore, their study showed that participants' writing abilities improved since they had to explain the work's content to their peers. Canva, which facilitate multimodal pedagogical approaches, are among the many educational resources for text writing that have been made available by technological breakthroughs. These methods work very well for improving the writing abilities of English language learners [28]. Moreover, studies show, for example, that Canva can be effectively used into classroom exercises that include producing poetry and text ads to engage high school students and enhance their writing skills [29]. These results further support the idea that multimedia resources such as Canva help ESL students improve their oral and written communication abilities. This discovery sheds light on the complex and diverse influence that Canva has, going beyond its function as a platform for creative teamwork to include a noticeable enhancement in students' writing skills when they work together with their peers [14]. Moreover, Canva is an adaptable and useful tool in the educational landscape since it not only operates as a catalyst for creative and innovative group projects but also as a transforming tool that enhances writing proficiency among students [13]–[15].

4. CONCLUSION

The present study was designed to investigate the effects of Canva and MS Teams on the students' writing. Moreover, the study explored the students' perceptions of using Canva to write informative speech essays. The findings have confirmed that Canva and MS Teams help improve students' writing skills. Writing is a skill that students acquire to gain knowledge and information, as well as to learn how to express their ideas and information in written form. Nevertheless, findings from the study suggest that using web technologies such as Canva and MS Teams as proposed solutions can enhance students' learning ability, particularly when assigned writing tasks. Most students expressed satisfaction with the online learning environment, with positive evaluations based on their experiences using Canva and MS Teams. In addition, online learning fosters interaction between students and teachers and among students themselves. However, some students expressed challenges using Canva since they used their smartphones to complete the writing task due to not owning laptops.

The current findings support the significance of using Canva and MS Teams for ESL classrooms. The findings suggest that online platforms can be useful for classroom instruction. The findings also suggest that online platforms augment the learning capabilities of students and provide them with an opportunity to work with their teachers and peers. A major practical contribution of the present research is that it came up with much-needed empirical data on the issue which can be very useful for educators and policy makers. The findings propose that traditional classrooms can be changed into collaborative, innovative, and creative classrooms if professional development programs include workshops on using online tools in ESL classrooms.

The empirical findings in this study provide a new understanding of the application of online tools for teaching language skills. The current study was delimited to study the effects of Canva and MS Teams on writing skills. Based on the findings, it is recommended that future researchers should investigate the uses of these platforms to enhance other linguistic skills. Moreover, future researchers should study the impact of Canva and MS Teams in blended classrooms.

Also, the small sample size did not allow the findings to be generalized to other settings. However, the study provides an understanding of the students' perspectives on online learning, emphasizing the importance of the learning environment and peer-to-peer interactions. Future studies should explore the significance of these factors in online learning across a broader range of majors and grade levels to broaden the student samples. Still, examining the effects of successful student participation in online learning is crucial, and paying attention to the interactions between students and the learning environment is vital. Another insight of the study is that it highlights the potential benefits of using web technologies such as Canva and MS Teams to support the learning environment for students, particularly when it comes to writing assignments. While there were some challenges related to using these tools since some students used smartphones for the writing task, most students expressed satisfaction with their online learning experiences. Finally, educators and legislators should consider incorporating these platforms into their classes to promote more creative and collaborative learning environments in conventional classrooms.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge the support provided by the Teaching and Learning Research Grant (PPU230101) awarded by Universiti Malaysia Pahang Al-Sultan Abdullah (UMPSA).

FUNDING INFORMATION

The article processing charge (APC) for this publication was supported by Onaizah Colleges, Saudi Arabia.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

This journal uses the Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT) to recognize individual author contributions, reduce authorship disputes, and facilitate collaboration.

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C : **C**onceptualization
M : **M**ethodology
So : **So**ftware
Va : **Va**lidation
Fo : **Fo**rmal analysis
I : **I**nvestigation
R : **R**esources
D : **D**ata Curation
O : Writing - **O**riginal Draft
E : Writing - Review & **E**diting
Vi : **Vi**sualization
Su : **Su**pervision
P : **P**roject administration
Fu : **Fu**nding acquisition

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

No known conflicting personal ties that might have seemed to have influenced the work described in this publication are disclosed by the authors.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding [ZA], author upon reasonable request.

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